

# News story: Dstl Reveals Venturefest Line Up for Small and Medium Enterprises

Discovering ways the Royal Navy might use artificial intelligence (AI) in future operations, and how desktop wargames help the Army learn risk analysis, are just two of the attractions lined up by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) for Venturefest South on 29 March at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton.

Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs) will be able to hear about the skills and equipment needs of the Armed Forces, and the opportunities to sell to the defence sector. Commercial and technical experts from Dstl, as well as military representatives, will be available for one-to-one meetings to explain the simple qualification process for businesses to work with Government.

Dstl is seeking new supply-chain partners for a series of research projects due to start this year across a diverse range of technology. The Laboratory has already announced additional funding of £40 million to £45 million to spend with external suppliers this year and set up the Searchlight initiative to engage with non-traditional Defence suppliers and SMEs to help meet this need.

Dstl will also be supported by representatives from the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) which speeds the development of innovative ideas into exploitable products and services for defence and security customers.

Dstl works with a range of start-ups and SMEs, providing funding and guidance to develop new and innovative ideas to help protect the UK's Armed Forces, helping companies grow and boosting the regional economy.

By working with investors, Dstl also helps companies to commercialise the impact and bring new technologies to market. Licensing agreements have been signed for 125 technologies across defence and security, biometrics, life sciences, and diagnostics, which have created 580 jobs.

Rob Solly, senior lead for Searchlight commented:

SMEs are essential supply-chain partners for Dstl and contribute to the unique capability we have in defence science and technology. By encouraging innovation and helping companies get their ideas and products into the defence arena we aspire to boost the regional economy and UK prosperity, as well as protecting our Armed Forces. We understand the pressures on small enterprises and we are determined to make working with Dstl as straightforward as possible.

Venturefest South is a not-for-profit initiative that has been created and developed by a group of partners within the regional innovation economy including: Carswell Gould, Solent LEP, Innovate UK, the Knowledge Transfer Network, University of Portsmouth, Southampton City Council, Solent University, The University of Southampton, Portsmouth City Council, and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.

[Find out more, apply to take part in any of the pitching sessions, showcase an innovation in the exhibition or sponsor Venturefest South 2019](#)

Additionally, a host of opportunities exist for SMEs to work across Dstl's portfolio over the next 12 months, and through the SME Searchlight programme there will be a series of events, workshops and consultations to develop a broader supplier community, particularly in the fields of radio frequency engineering, artificial intelligence, synthetic biology and wargaming. The team can be contacted by emailing [searchlight@dstl.gov.uk](mailto:searchlight@dstl.gov.uk)